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ABSTRACT

The articles in this journal issue explore the current status of writing instruction and scholarship. The titles of the articles and their authors are as follows: (1) "The Writing 'Crisis': What It Is and What It Ain't" (Rexford Brown); (2) "Freshman English Then and Now: A Report on Student Writing" (James DeMuth and Stephanie Jo Haugen); (3) "Student and Faculty Attitudes: The Quality of Student Writing Skills" (W. Lee Hansen); (4) "A Modest Effort at Reinforcement of Writing Skills" (Isabelle Stelmahoske and Mary Ann Baird); and (5) "Shared Accountability for Schooling and Composition Learning" (Terrance Sheridan). Reviews of selected books for children and adolescents are included. (HTH)

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COMPOSITION: STATE OF THE ART

For English Teachers At All Levels
October, 1981 Volume 21, No. 1

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Wisconsin English Journal

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CHISHOLM AWARD FOR MERITORIOUS SERVICE

Citation for NANCY HOEFS

Continuing a tradition of some years standing, WCTE is pleased to present the Frank Chisolm Award to Nancy Hoefs, a Wisconsin teacher who has made significant contributions to the English profession. The recepient this year received the unanimous endorsement of the WCTE Executive Committee.

Nancy Hoefs started her teaching career in Wisconsin at Mayville and then joined in 1957 the English Department of Nicolet High School, a suburb of Milwaukee.

For years she has been a most loyal member of the English Association of Greater Milwaukee, serving on the Executive Board in a number of capacities. She also has been an active participant in WCTE since its inception, being one of its original members. As a WCTE member she has held a number of important positions. As Southeast Director, she planned a variety of English activities for English teachers of that region.

Nancy Hoefs's astute financial management has been invaluable to both the local and state organizations. For years she managed the financial resources of the English Association of Greater Milwaukee, giving that up to assume the position of treasurer for WCTE. As some of us remember, when WCTE was in financial difficulty, the then Executive Board was able, with Nancy Hoefs's financial expertise, to solve a long-standing problem. Today, thanks to her abilities, WCTE is now in a relatively healthy financial position.

She has devoted her professional life to teaching English at the high school level. At Nicolet she has taught a variety of courses. Most recently her work in the Nicolet English Department has been with disabled readers, a too-often overlooked group that deserve her subject-matter competency and interpersonal skills.

With the presentation of this award, we acknowledge Nancy Hoefs's energetic support of WCTE and look forward with pleasure to her continued participation.

--written by John W. Stewig, Milwaukee

Wisconsin English Journal: Foci of Future Issues

Composition Teaching Strategies
More on Composition Teaching/Evaluating
Classroom Approaches to Teaching Literature

THE WRITING "CRISIS": WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT AIN'T*

REXFORD BROWN
National Assessment of Education Progress Office

I have entitled this talk "The Writing Crisis: What It Is and What It Ain't" simply because it sounded good. But I hope today to say a little bit about what precisely is happening in writing as opposed to the mythology of what's happening in writing. And then to add to that some of my own thoughts about what this means for us as parents, as concerned teachers, and as people who have to write for a living.

I like to think that the task of teaching writing is akin to the task accorded certain tribesmen in remote areas of the Philippines: that is, to preserve a fire which has been burning for centuries, to shelter it against the rains, and to keep its flame alive because if it goes out, no one knows how to start one anew. Only the fire has been passed from generation to generation in these tribes, not its secret. If it goes out, the tribe dies, so central has fire become to its very survival. In such a situation it's possible to argue about whether the fire is doing well or is going out, or whether it's being fed diligently or being too carelessly attended. But the tribe is most likely to survive if it adopts a policy that assumes that the fire is always in danger, that this matter is always verging on crisis, that you can never have too much wood on hand or have too many people ready to protect it from catastrophes. I think our tribe is wise to have such a policy with regard to writing.

We should feel that it's so central to our life as a nation and to our needs as individuals and that it's so vulnerable to snows of cultural indifference and tidalwaves of shabby example that its fostering and husbanding are always matter of crisis. If someone says writing skills may be declining, we should act as if it were true and not waste time disputing the charge, because the consequences, if the doomsayers are right, are simply too important to ignore. In fact, I think it will always be true enough that writing is an endangered art. In the midst of a geometric knowledge explosion, not enough people will ever command the art to support a moment's pause or the least slackening of our effort to promote the broadest possible literacy. I am thinking of the literacy of senders as well as receivers of meaningful information: a literacy that assumes the capacity, through language, to achieve self-understanding and to communicate a realized self, unambiguously, to others.

Consider, first, the larger context of literacy. I define two levels of literacy -- Literacy A and Literacy B -- and then I imagine two groups of people with concerns about literacy. Group A are people who think of literacy in terms of THE BASICS: basic reading, which primarily seems to involve literal comprehension of things, and often involves the notion that people have to read certain things in order to survive; basic calculating, which means that people should be able to keep a check book, add, subtract, multiply, divide -- that kind of thing; and basic writing, the notion that people who graduate from high school should be able to write a sentence with accurate punctuation, good grammar, appropriate usage -- including never using the word "aint." And then I define Group B, the members of which might be interested in a higher definition of literacy. They think of reading in terms of the ability to interpret editorials, to

*An edited version of the speech given at the Invitational Composition Conference.

interpret works of literature and understand irony, propaganda, and so on. They think of the inferential dimension more than the literal dimension of reading. Where math is concerned, they're looking at word problems, the ability to apply math, understanding of mathematics--that sort of thing. Where writing is concerned, they're interested in syntactic fluency and rhetorical fluency.

These are two kinds of literacy, each of which has broad support and different constituents in America. And they're not continuous. By that I mean that the skills involved in Literacy A, the fundamentals, are not things that, when taught, lead automatically to Literacy B. Literacy B is not just lots of Literacy A. Inferencing and interpreting, for instance, are not just a lot of decoding; they're different. They're discontinuous. I chose those two definitions because I wanted definitions of literacy which had different implications for teaching. You cannot get Literacy B, the ability to interpret and draw inferences and command writing in a variety of situations for different audiences and so on, simply by teaching Literacy A.

Examining the data to see if different things were happening with each kind of literacy, here's what I found when I went through the National Assessment results over the last ten years and other kinds of data about literacy in America. Looking at Literacy A first and the areas outside of writing, it looks to me as if over 90 percent of the nation's 17-year-olds can perform functional reading tasks. The percentage for Black Americans is lower, but it seems to be rising somewhat. Rural teenagers and those from homes with no high-school-educated parents also seem to be improving over the last ten years. National Assessment exercises assessing literal comprehension skills in the 1970 and the 1975 reading assessment tests indicate that the vast majority of teenagers can read at this level, and the percentage is not declining as some education critics have claimed. In all the studies I looked at, girls performed better than boys, slightly. Students from homes in which a parent had post-high school education performed better than those from homes in which neither parent attended high school. Students from high socioeconomic status districts performed better than those from low districts. Although there are substantial percentages (10 percent can be considered substantial) of people who do not show mastery of these fundamentals, nevertheless, the vast majority appears to have them well in hand.

Turning to Literacy A mathematics, the first National Assessment of Mathematics in 1975 established that well over 90 percent of the 17-year-olds could perform simple addition, and about 85-90 percent could perform simple subtraction. Between 80 and 90 percent could multiply and divide, although the percentage usually dropped when decimals were involved. Simple computation with fractions and integers proved more difficult, but percentages were in the 70-80 percent range, nevertheless. When computation involves translation -- word problems -- the results are lower, especially for different minority groups. The median performance level for Blacks, for example, on word problems was 21 points below the national level. So there's work to be done there.

This fall we released the Second National Assessment of Mathematics results looking at changes between 1975 and 1980. And those results do *not* reveal a marked decline in the fundamentals. Although there was an overall 5 percent decline in skills, most of it was caused by declines in algebraic and fraction computations, not in simple addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Literacy in math -- I guess the buzzword these days is "numeracy" -- may not be advancing, but it's not losing ground.

Another area I looked at was our three science assessments. We took the science items and arranged them in terms of the cognitive activities they required using Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive domains. The domains range from knowledge, which is just grinding facts into your brain and memorizing them, to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, this last being the highest cognitive activity. We took all our items and divided them into those categories and then looked to see where differences were greatest from group to group and where the declines were taking place. We found that the declines in skills were not taking place at the lower levels -- knowledge, comprehension, or low-level application. We also found that when we looked at the differences between various groups of people and the nation, the differences get wider and wider as you go up that cognitive ladder toward higher level skills. For instance, the difference between Blacks and Whites at the lowest level was 13.4 points. At comprehension, it was -14; at application, -17; at analysis and synthesis, -20. Looking at children who come from homes where there was no high school educated parents, it goes -7, -7, -9, and above -9; in other words, the higher up the ladder you go in terms of demands that are made, the greater the distance becomes between those who are acquiring a good education and those who aren't.

If we assume that Literacy A is defined more in terms of knowledge and comprehension level skills, with a certain amount of application, there are some considerable differences even at the most basic level. But the most worrisome point is that the differences do become greater as you move up the skill ladder.

Now, let me turn to Literacy B. Going back to reading now, the results for higher-level comprehension skills are lower than they are for lower-level skills. That's no big secret--they're harder. Looking at the results, I found that fewer 17-year-olds show skill in comprehending reading materials that require a certain amount of inferencing: for example, recognizing that an author is making contradictory claims or inferring from a television schedule that if one's watching program A, he can't be watching program B. Since many functional reading materials, like warrantees, guarantees, insurance policies, loan agreements, and so on, require complicated inferences, these lower percentages bear directly upon the practical effects of illiteracy. As was the case with Literacy A, I found that advantaged groups tend to perform better than disadvantaged groups. But for Literacy B, the gap is even wider. The Black-White difference for all reading exercises, for instance, is 14 points. But if you look at just the inference exercises, it's 24 points. The gap between the no-high-school and post-high-school groups and the inner-city and the affluent suburban groups are much larger when you begin to look at inferencing, interpreting skills -- higher level reading skills.

Although, as I just noted, low-level reading skills do not appear to be declining, these higher level skills are declining. The decline of 17-year olds' reading performance between 1970 and 1975 is almost entirely attributable to lower percentages of success on inferential comprehension items. This is some support for the contention that the two literacies I defined are different in character. That is, if low level skills are not declining throughout the 60's and 70's but higher level skills are, then they can't be on the same teaching and learning continuum.

Turning to mathematics, recent Congressional testimony has succinctly summed up the trends in mathematics. As soon as our math report came out, the House Education and Labor Committee held hearings on mathematics education and invited a number of people to comment on our results. One

of them was Shirley Hill, President of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, who said, "The inescapable conclusion to be derived from the results of the Second National Assessment of Mathematics is that there is a critical need for attention to higher level cognitive skills -- reasoning, analyzing, estimating, selecting appropriate information, and inferring. These basic skills are essential to the effective application of mathematics." And these happen to be the skills that account for the declines we saw in mathematics, not the low-level basic skills.

The Third Science Assessment indicated that 17-year-olds' level of performance continues to decline. However, it's declining fastest in the area of physical science. If you look at the materials we use to assess physical science, you find out that the majority of questions involve application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation skills. In biology, which showed a slight slowing of the drop, the majority of questions involved knowledge and comprehension. So again, there are grounds, even in science, for suspecting that the results reflect the same decline in Literacy B's skills that the other assessments show.

Now, let's turn to writing. Ten years ago we released a report on writing mechanics that provided some early data on literacy skills. We saw that the average 17-year-old made between two and three punctuation errors per 100 words, about one capitalization error per 100 words, about one sentence fragment, run-on sentence, agreement error per essay, and about two misspellings per 100 words. The error rates were highest for the worst writers. That's why averages have to be looked at carefully. Excellent writers have much lower percentages. Two thirds of the average and good writers had no capitalization errors; three-fourths had no sentence fragments or run-on sentences, and over 90 percent made no paragraphing errors. These are not particularly alarming figures. Although the sample essays that we looked at don't inspire excitement about basic writing ability, neither do they lend support to the belief that many 17-year olds cannot write simple sentences.

We came out with a different report five years later, after the Second Writing Assessment, and in this we compared the writing in two different assessments and found that the writing in the mid '70's was of somewhat lower quality than the writing done in the late 60's. But the surface structure of the characteristics of the writing--punctuation, and so on--doesn't appear to have contributed to that decline. And it is safe to say that the relative occurrence of misspellings, punctuation, capitalization, word choice, and so on, is about the same as it always was. So, summing up the Literacy A concerns for writing, there do not seem to be major signs in our data that low-level writing skills are declining; they seem to remain about the same. The error counts are about the same, the basics are about the same.

Our group B would expect 17-year olds to be able to write coherently in a number of different situations and in a number of different modes. Our First Assessment shows that there was a considerable difference between middle quality and high quality papers, primarily in that better writers are apparently better able to choose various constructions instead of being limited to a few choices or no choice. The Second Writing Assessment suggested that the factors contributing most to the lower quality of 17-year olds writing were not surface structure features; rather, they were increases in run-on sentences, awkward constructions, and fragments, coupled with decreases in the use of complex sentences, less modification, less concreteness, and fewer of the conventions that are critical to maintaining coherence. These are not simple problems. What's declining in writing is not something you can really grasp in a simple formula.

The Second Assessment also showed considerable variation in the percentage of students who are able to write for different purposes and audiences. This suggests that a good many teenagers probably don't have flexible writing skills that can be varied as situations dictate. As in the other subjects, Literacy B in writing is declining, not Literacy A. It's important to note that the decline is entirely accounted for by middle-and-low-quality writers. There appear to be as many excellent writers as there have been in the past. So it appears that the declines in Literacy B are not declines in advanced or esoteric skills useful only to elite writers; they are declines that affect the average and poor writers, who constitute the majority.

In the wake of superficial and one sided reporting of these findings, we have heard again the cry, "Back to Basics!" as if there were some agreement about what the basics were or whether or not we've ever left them.To parents it often means, "back to what I had to suffer through." To many school administrators, it means "back to what I feel comfortable with." To school boards, it means "back to something cheaper" and to the public at large it means something like "back to readin', writin', and arithmetic." This last advice is not altogether bad since I suspect that the coherence problem stems in part in a decrease in the amount of reading and writing people actually do these days more than from anything else. For instance, in the early 70's, there was an 11 percent decrease in the proportion of students taking English courses in America. And there was also a general drop in the enrollment in all academic courses that require higher level thinking skills; this could, in itself, account for a lot of these problems. If students haven't read very much, every time they sit down to compose they're forced to invent literature all over again as if it didn't exist, and that's a lot to ask. And if people don't actually read and write much, it cannot be surprising that they do it poorly. But I don't think that the people behind the three R's movement have that in mind when they use the word "basics." I think they mean grammar and drill. Accordingly, I want to argue for an expanded definition of "basics." I have four opinions on this matter.

First, grammar is not what's basic about writing any more than memorizing aircraft assembly manuals is basic to flying. It's important, it's interesting, and no good pilot is going to neglect that knowledge, but it's perfectly possible to know the parts of an airplane and have no idea how to fly it, no desire to get off the ground, or no sense of the utility or the beauty of flying. Ability to describe the language is not directly related to the ability to use it, the desire to use it, or the understanding of the benefits of using it. It's highly important, but it's secondary.

My second opinion is this: writing for no particular reason, for no particular person on subjects of no particular interest to the writer or anyone else is not basic to writing. The metaphor in this case is a random firing of rockets into space just to pass the time with the excitement of blast-offs. The sense of accomplishment is enormous, but no one ever sees the rockets again. All anyone learns is ignition.

My third opinion is that mastering the job application and letter and the interoffice memo is not basic to writing. Only a fool ignores these utilitarian professional advantages of good writing. It's certainly important that all students learn this, or they'll be sorry.

My fourth opinion is that what's basic about writing is discovery and expression, because these are experiences that are both valuable in them-

selves and essential to the development of higher-order thinking skills. One of the few things we do alone, writing gives us the opportunity every time we sit down with pencil and paper, to discover ourselves, to clarify our intentions, and to communicate a realized self unambiguously to others. It gives us the opportunity, increasingly rare in this client-centered, passive culture, to be agents, to be actors. Training in writing is training in human agency. And later on it's training in careful thinking, and the two are closely linked. I've heard many reasons why we should worry about the writing of American students. We should worry because they can't get into college. We should worry because they can't get out of college. We should worry because the inability of workers to document their activities accurately results every year in billions of dollars wasted on retraining activities and unnecessary reinventions of various wheels. We should worry because ambiguous memos require memos seeking clarification which, being obscure themselves, require further memos, and this again costs money. We should worry because the delegation of writing skills to a privileged class is delegation of thinking to a privileged class. We should worry because no employer willingly hires bad spellers. We should worry because standard written English is still the dialect of power, and people who don't have the dialect of power go without their share of the power. And we should worry because one of the best ways to know what you know is to try to explain it in writing.

Now these are all respectable reasons for alarm, but I want another reason to receive equal emphasis. We should worry, I think, because the decline in writing ability, however remotely, signals a decline in the will or capacity for a self-understanding that leads to human agency. Granted, there are other ways of achieving human agency. But writing has been such a major facilitor of agency that even the slightest possibility of erosion in that skill is terrifying, especially in a society that already does too much for its citizens, already deprives them of too many opportunities to think hard about things and take action. And there's more at stake. The elusive personal fantasies and heroic enterprises and unclarified intentions that shape our lives; that give direction to our careers, marriages, divorces, relationships; that fuel our flights of ecstasy and drive us to despair, are largely unconscious and primarily assessable to us through reflective language. An education that will lead us to true adulthood would enable people to acquire understanding of those powerful buried intentions through mastery of reflective language. To express them and to express the emotions that these intentions trigger is to gain control over them and to deprive them of their capricious control over us. Only when we've achieved that in some measure can we use productively and creatively the rest that we learn along the way. If we hold as an ideal a society of self-actuating, responsible citizens, then we have to aspire to an ideal educational system that seizes upon children's natural enthusiasm for language, that reinforces the power they feel as language opens their worlds and that encourages them to explore and define themselves periodically with words on paper. Once a child has developed an appreciation for the liberating and connecting power of language, the rest is easy. Not even the worst of teachers or parents can stop children from learning how to organize and edit their material to best advantage. Rest assured that the time for communicating a personal vision to someone always arises, and when it does, the writers are eager to learn what they need to learn in order to convey it well. A long-term corrective for a writing crisis is to put self-understanding and clarification of ideas and intentions at the center of the educational process: to promote language skills as the best tools for that process, to make the cultivation of those skills the responsibility of every teacher regardless of subject

matter expertise, and to so addict students at early age to the emotional and practical benefits of writing that they can never again kick the habit.

I'm quite aware that our students and many of us (be honest) prefer oral and visual modes of communication to written. It's hard to recommend the slow, clumsy, difficult-to-master medium of writing without feeling a little bit anachronistic, a little bit square, but I don't know what else to do. A society as complex as ours certainly can't sustain itself with a primarily oral culture, and it should not have a primarily visual culture either, because such a culture is too easily controlled by a powerful few. It's dishonest to tell our students directly or indirectly that oral communication will suffice in their personal lives, because it serves primarily social functions, not personal ones. It would be equally dishonest to tell them that they'll all one day express and explore themselves as film directors. For most of them, as for most of us, visual experience would be passive. But they need their fantasies to know themselves -- their nightmares and imaginings, their hard thinking, not someone else's -- and training in writing can lead them to those self-discoveries which are the pre-conditions of all real learning. Self-knowledge is, after all, related to the coherence problem. Granting that most incoherence or faulty coherence in student writing is due to a lack of familiarity with the conventions of written discourse, I still can't help thinking that some of it is attributable to the incoherence of a contradictory social and educational system. If you know who you are and what your intentions are, you cohere and your writing will probably reflect that. The less certain you are of yourself, the less coherent your use of language. If your society assists you in finding yourself, you're more likely to be coherent than if your society presents you with too much contradiction, too much paradox at too early an age through irrestibly powerful media.

The writing crisis is caused in part, then, by an inadequate understanding of the conventions of print culture; much of this misunderstanding is a consequence of too little exposure to print culture, too little internalization of models, and too little concrete experimentation with language. But the writing crisis is also a motivational problem -- a lack of awareness of the personal and social benefits the self-discovery, the training in clarification of intentions, the liberation of expressiveness. Some students have either not been hooked, or were hooked briefly and then frightened off by an atomized or narrow-minded approach to the teaching of writing.

Finally, however, the writing crisis may be a reflection of other social crises. Our students hear daily the language of bureaucracy -- whether educational or governmental bureaucracy -- with its overuse of the passive voice to escape or bury responsibility, its intense efforts to nominalize the world, to rid the language of verbs, and its cowardly pretense to objectivity. Our students hear and read the language of the "Oh-Wow" counterculture, with its phony associationalism (titillating the callow and circumventing tiresome logic), its substitution of name dropping for clear explanation, and its juxtaposition for juxtaposition's sake. Our students watch television, and, in a single moment, go from Rangoon to New York to a man sailing in a boat in someone's toilet and back to Rangoon without batting an eye. They see little coherence around them, and no one has taught them ways of achieving personal coherence, so what can they do? They can write incoherently; they can read incoherent writers like McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, or William Erwin Thompson; they can go to incoherent movies like the "Long Goodbye" or "Taxi Driver;" they can join an ashram or secure a position in an American university.

This is clearly a problem that we can't attack haphazardly. Just as we're facing on the energy front the reality that all things are interdependent and that piecemeal steps won't solve our problems, we have to face the reality that the same conditions obtain on the educational front. We won't solve the writing problem by focusing our attention on the most superficial aspect of writing or even by focusing on writing itself as an area cut off somehow from the rest of our lives. The basics we must get back to are the basics of creating coherent lives for ourselves by means of that symbolic faculty that distinguishes us from all the other forms of life on the planet.

To repeat for the last time: whatever the evidence, always act like the Promethean fire of writing is in danger. This most powerful, yet most vulnerable, of gifts from the gods makes our very humanization possible. In the chilly, dark days ahead, we can't afford to lose one more degree of heat or a single additonal quantum of life.

Freshman English Then and Now
Continued from page 12

the students from the two eras. Classes in the 1940's emphasized grammar rather than development. Grading was stricter. Mundane topics for the themes were chosen and not developed well as compared to the development in the 1980 themes. Opinionated papers exhibited the differences and similarities between the political and economical views of the 1940 students versus the 1980 students. These 1940-41 themes are a treasure of information about River Falls University students back in that time period.

I concur with Ms. Haugen's appraisals of the themes written for Professor Hanna's class, though I must qualify some points of her general argument. Her claims, stated and implied, that Professor Hanna and his class were typical of their time can not be strictly demonstrated, although the "Term Record" which Professor Hanna used to evaluate themes was a standard evaluative form. Another qualification I would make concerns Ms. Haugen's self-portrayal as a spokesman for and representative of student writers today; she is a distinguished student. Finally, we should remember that Ms. Haugen's characterizations of grading standards and writing assignments in composition classes today are impressionistic and limited.

Yet, with these qualifications in mind, I still believe that Ms. Haugen has validly analysed the themes she surveyed. In reviewing samples of those themes, I also discovered that their subjects were shallow, their paragraph development was sketchy, and their diction favored the "Engfish" of cliches and hackneyed phrases. I only noticed two areas in which they were apparently better than student writing today: their punctuation was more conventional, though perhaps because the students favored, or were encouraged to favor, simple declarative sentences; and their appearance was neater. Margins were exactly measured and ruled; penmanship was careful.

While looking over the collection of those student themes, and comparing them in my mind to Ms. Haugen's paper, I was reminded of an incident from Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. Franklin reports that as adolescents he and his friend Collins exchanged a series of letters debating "the propriety of educating the female sex in learning and their abilities for study." Franklin's father discovered the papers and read them: "Without entering into the subject in dispute, he took occasion to talk with me about my manner of writing, observed that though I had the advantage of my antagonist in correct spelling and pointing (which I owed to the printing house) I fell far short in elegance of expression, in method, and in perspicuity."

FRESHMAN ENGLISH THEN AND NOW: A REPORT ON STUDENT WRITING

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We are often indebted to students for fresh appraisals of familiar subjects and common opinions. On the subject of Freshman English, a common opinion is that the standards of teaching and writing have declined, usually from some unspecified time in the past. This opinion is so pervasive, I believe, because those who might criticize it lack any reliable means of examining the golden age of teaching and writing from which we are said to have fallen. This past year (1979-80), Stephanie Haugen, a student in one of my Freshman English classes, unearthed such a means; Ms. Haugen discovered in the Area Research Center, our local offices of the State Historical Society, a box containing some 300 themes written in 1940 and 1941 for the Freshman English classes of Professor Orvan M. Hanna at River Falls State Teachers' College. When she asked if she could use these themes as the primary sources for her documented paper, I said, "Yes!! Let me know if you run into any problems. Bring in your rough draft or outline so we can go over it together. Good luck."

While it is undoubtedly true that the State Teachers' College of 1940 was different from the University of 1980, and that no strictly accurate comparisons can be made between classes which merely share the same title, the English themes do present opportunities for analysis and inference. In reviewing the entire collection of them, Ms. Haugen was able to identify the typical writing assignments, to describe the leading characteristics of style, organization and content of the themes, and to define clearly the standards of evaluation in the class because each packet of themes was accompanied by a detailed "Term Record" completed by the instructor, Professor Hanna. I will here reprint excerpts from Ms. Haugen's paper, as originally written, and then comment upon them (it is a rare teacher who can resist the temptation to have the last word).

ENGLISH THEMES

In an old cupboard at the River Falls University, some 1940-41 English themes from Professor Orval M. Hanna's Freshman English Composition class were recently found. . . . Professor Hanna's teaching procedures differed from those of professors of today through his emphasis on grammar rather than thought and his actual grading. His courses from 1940-41 would appear to be very easy to 1980 students because of these differences. Hanna's students were also different from students today as evidenced by their topics of writing, the development in their writing, and originality in their their writing. . . .

When compared to professors today, Professor Hanna was very different in his English classes. Today, emphasis is placed on the thought and development that is put into a paper. The ideas that are stated and how they are backed or proven is the major goal in themes today. Development in paragraphs through good topic sentences, conclusion sentences, and examples is essential. Transitions between paragraphs is another area which is emphasized. Today grammar is thought to be known by all students. Only a few weeks of the entire academic year are spent studying grammar. The rest of the year deals with development. The few grammar errors which are found today are noticed, but they are forgiven. In Professor Hanna's class,

however, grammar was the major emphasis of writing. Proof of this was clearly shown in the Term Record of each student. Thirteen columns were allowed for sentence structure. Punctuation and capitalization occupied seven columns. Appearance had four columns. An entire wide column was allowed for a list of other rules violated. There was even a column just for grammar. All of these columns dealt with the mechanics of writing. Only three columns -- diction, paragraph, and thought -- were dedicated to development. Though these three columns were in the Term Record, there was never anything written underneath them. Columns dealing with rules violated and punctuation and capitalization were the columns usually dealt with most.

Through his corrections and comments on the themes, Professor Hanna himself also showed the emphasis given to grammar. "Form and technique will be quite difficult for you. A good dictionary will give you the correct spelling of all words." This student's paper was not well written and deserved the "F" it received. The interesting observation is that no word was given to development. Other comments such as, "Your information is quite adequate. Proofreading carefully will show much improvement as you go along." were for an average theme. "Crowded" was the only comment given to an extensive outline which deserved a better explanation for the "B-" it received. Professor Hanna's main goal in his English classes was obviously good grammar.

Grading of the themes was much more stringent in 1940-41 than it is now. Though "F's" were rare, "A's" were just as rare. A "B+" or "B" was an excellent grade; a "C" or "C-" was poor; any "D" was bad; and "B-'s" were given when the theme did not seem to fit into any other grade category. In a tally taken of 267 themes, only twelve "A's" were recorded. Today, if a paper is well written, an "A" is awarded accordingly. Grading today has become more balanced and less difficult than it was in the 1940's. . . .

The students of Professor Hanna's class wrote differently from students today. In the 1940's, themes dealt with shallow, obvious topics like "How to Reach My Home," "My Experiences," "Me," "My Home Town," and "My Study Habits." These were topics which the student was very familiar with and could write a lot about in a very short time. They differed greatly from topics of today's themes like "The Fascinations of an M&M", or "The Self-made Man versus Citizen Kane." A lot of thought, time, and/or research is needed to today's topics. Topics of 1940-41 needed a lot less imagination and research compared to today.

Lengths, styles, and contents of the 1940 themes were very elementary. A theme today is about four typed pages long. A theme back then was half a written page to two or three written pages. Introductions and conclusions were not used in the themes. As long as the student wrote his story or book report, nothing else was needed. All papers were opinionated, but only a few really backed these opinions with facts. When writing on study habits, for example, the time spent on each subject was important, but why a certain length of time was spent was not usually stated. Data for themes like this was also usually inconsistent. Most students wrote on one day of studying, not on an average day of studying. The teacher was then only interested in the total hours spent studying, not in the validity of the paper itself. Students' themes were not very lengthy, developed, or valid in 1940-41. . . .

Professor Hanna's Freshman Composition English themes from 1940-41 have really proven helpful in showing the differences and similarities of

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STUDENT AND FACULTY ATTITUDES: THE QUALITY OF STUDENT WRITING SKILLS

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What is the condition of students' writing skills on the Madison campus? What can or should be done to improve their writing skills? This report answers these and other questions, drawing upon the results of two 1976-77 surveys,[1] one of undergraduate students and the other of regular faculty members. These two surveys were designed to provide the campus community with information needed to help decide what if anything might be done to improve student writing skills.

Principal Findings

--Faculty members attach much greater importance to good writing skills than do students.

--Students report considerably more confidence in the quality of their writing skills than faculty members believe is warranted.

--Students are required to do relatively little writing either in their last year of high school English or in most of their college courses.

--General agreement exists between students and faculty members about the criteria to use in evaluating writing assignments and essay examination answers although faculty standards are more stringent.

--Most faculty members have made little or no special effort since the 1971 change in the undergraduate writing requirement to improve the writing skills of their students except to refer them to the Writing Laboratory.

--Students view their regular courses, advanced writing course, and the Writing Laboratory as most important in accounting for whatever improvement has occurred in their writing since entering college.

--Both students and faculty members believe that a required freshman composition course should be reinstituted, with students favoring a one-semester and faculty members favoring a two-semester course. Although students strongly favor the establishment of elective writing courses, relatively few indicated a desire to enroll in such courses if they were available.

--Faculty members generally support the establishment of new writing courses although this support weakened if the resources for these courses were to be taken from the various academic departments. When asked whether their departments would give up resources to improve the writing of their own undergraduates, faculty support diminished substantially.

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[1] These surveys were undertaken as part of the work of the Chancellor's Committee on Improving Student Writing Skills on which I served. The surveys, designed by a sub-committee, were carried out by the staff of the University of Wisconsin Survey Research Laboratory; the assistance of Professor Harry Sharp, director of the Survey Research Laboratory, is gratefully acknowledged.

Interpretation of Results

Interpretation of these survey results requires caution. From two random samples of 500 students and 500 faculty members on campus in the spring and fall semesters of 1976, approximately a third of both the students and faculty members responded. Because of possible non-randomness in the respondents, the results do not necessarily reflect the views of either the student body as a whole or the entire faculty. Unfortunately, the short time period and limited resources available to the committee made it impossible to send out followup questionnaires to increase the response rates or to undertake selective interviews with respondents. Disparities in responses of students and faculty members to similar questions may indicate the existence of both real differences between students and faculty and also biases resulting from unknown differences in respondents.

It is apparent from the survey data that certain characteristics of faculty respondents differed from those of the student instructor respondents; e.g., larger proportions of faculty members taught upper division courses or smaller classes than students reported taking. At the same time faculty members who responded appeared, by some of their comments on the questionnaires, to be those most concerned about student writing skills. For these reasons, differences in responses to similar questions, such as proportions of courses requiring papers, should not be interpreted as evidence of misleading responses by either students or faculty members.

Conflicting Views on Writing and Writing Skills

Perhaps the chief difference between undergraduate students and faculty members is reflected by judgments about how much the quality of students' writing will influence their future professional success. As might be expected, faculty members attach considerably more importance to writing skills than do students. Eighty-four percent of the faculty, contrasted to only fifty percent of the students, believed that writing would have a "major" or "considerable" influence on their professional futures. Fifty percent of the students reported that writing would have "no," "some," or "little" effect on their later success. Faculty members over age 50 attached greater importance to the influence of writing than did middle-aged (35-49) or younger (under 35) faculty members.

Not only was the importance attached to writing weakest in the sciences, but the disparity in the viewpoints of students and faculty members was greater there than in the humanities and social sciences. In both the physical and biological sciences, sixty-eight percent of the faculty respondents believe writing ability has a "considerable" or "major" influence on the professional future of their students. Among students, however, only eighteen percent in the biological sciences and twenty-nine percent in the physical sciences shared this view about the importance of writing.

How well equipped are students to write when they enter the university? Students are far more confident about their abilities than are the faculty members who teach them. Fifty-seven percent of the students indicated they were either "well" or "reasonably" prepared in writing skills as entering freshmen. For example, over sixty percent of the juniors and seniors as contrasted to forty percent of the freshmen and sophomores thought they had been "reasonably" or "well" prepared as entering freshmen. Whether this reflects survival characteristics of student, faulty memories, or real differences is not clear.

The faculty assessment of student preparation was much lower. Forty-nine percent of the faculty respondents believed typical UW freshmen to be "poorly" or "very poorly" prepared in writing skills. No faculty members found freshmen "well prepared" and only two percent consider them "reasonably prepared." It is important to note here that twenty-nine percent of the faculty respondents indicated they were unable to assess the preparation of freshmen in writing. The views of faculty members differed little across the various divisions, except in the humanities where the sentiment was strongest that students were ill-prepared. There was a slight tendency for the dissatisfaction with writing skills to decrease as the age of faculty members increased.

To determine whether the quality of undergraduate writing has changed over time, faculty members were asked to compare the writing of present undergraduate students with those of a decade ago. Only four percent believed an improvement had occurred, twenty-one percent thought there had been "no change," and forty-two percent thought student writing was now "somewhat" or "much" worse. One-third of the faculty said they could not respond to the question. The belief that writing skills had declined was somewhat less strong among older faculty aged 50 and above. Once again, respondents from the humanities most frequently noted a deterioration in writing skills over the past decade.

Writing: How Much Do Students Do?

How much writing are students required to do and how is their writing evaluated by faculty members? To learn something about their writing experiences prior to college, students were asked to indicate the number and average length of the assigned papers they wrote during their last year of high school English courses. The results are illuminating. Over one-fifth of the students could not recall how much they had written. The remaining students reported writing an average of four papers for which the average length was slightly less than five pages. In other words, students preparing for entrance to college produced an average of less than twenty pages in all of their paper writing assignments during their final year of secondary school English instruction; this is less than ten pages of assigned writing per semester.

How different are the demands on students' writing skills at the University? To answer this question, we asked students about the quantity and length of papers required in their college courses. Students reported they were assigned papers in about forty percent of their courses. In those courses they wrote an average of three papers. These papers tended to be rather short, with an average length of six pages. Based on this information, the writing experience of the typical freshman-sophomore student in a typical one-semester course consists on average of about seven pages of assigned writing (three papers of six pages each, with a forty percent probability of the paper being assigned). Freshman and sophomores wrote less--about four pages--while seniors wrote considerably more--about twelve pages. Differences in the amount of writing done by division proved to be relatively small.

Faculty members were asked about the amount of writing they required in their courses. They reported giving writing assignments in two-thirds of their undergraduate courses. The average number of papers assigned in those courses was three, with almost no differences among the four divisions. Older faculty members (age 50 and over) assigned an average of four papers as compared to two papers assigned by all younger faculty members. The overall average length of assigned papers was six pages, with older faculty assigning papers averaging four pages as compared to eight pages

for younger faculty members. We can now characterize the typical faculty member as requiring about twelve pages of assigned writing in a typical course, with no differences in the total required pages for faculty of different ages.

If instead of averages we employ medians to measure the amount of writing produced and required, the totals decline to about four pages for students and about six pages for faculty members. The use of medians might be preferred by some if they believe there was any tendency for students and faculty members to overestimate when recalling the number and length of students' assigned papers.

The importance of assigned papers in determining course grades was also investigated. Students reported that the papers they did write counted towards about twenty percent of their final grade. Faculty members said that they gave a thirty percent weight to assigned papers.

Answering essay questions in examinations is another important writing experience for students though it is done under more intense time pressure. Students reported that about a third of the time in their examinations was devoted to essay questions and their answers to these questions, with the answers receiving a weight of thirty-five percent in determining final grades.

As mentioned earlier, differences between answers by students and faculty may reflect the characteristics of those who chose to respond, e.g., faculty respondents who emphasized writing may have been more inclined to respond to the questionnaire.

How is Student Writing Evaluated?

We also attempted to learn the extent of agreement between students and faculty members about the criteria used to evaluate papers. Significantly, the importance attached by faculty members and students to each of four major criteria did not differ appreciably. Both students and faculty members ranked the criteria in the same way: "content, facts, and supporting material" were viewed as most important, "organization and development" came next, "clarity and sentence structure" followed, and "grammar, punctuation, and spelling" ranked last. Faculty members in the humanities generally appeared to be the most exacting in their standards, as reflected by the relatively greater importance they attached to each of the criteria. No comparable difference appeared in the responses of humanities students, however. Not too surprisingly, both faculty and students believed in relaxing the application of these four criteria, particularly those involving "grammar, punctuation, and spelling," in the evaluation of answers to examination questions.

A common complaint is that students' papers are not promptly returned or carefully evaluated. The vast majority of the students indicated that their papers were returned before the end of the semester. Faculty members said they were less prompt about getting papers back to students before the end of the semester; a quarter of them reported either "not" or "sometimes not" getting papers back on time.

An overwhelming majority (87 percent) of the students responded that their papers were evaluated by both a grade and brief comments. Forty-six percent of the faculty respondents indicated they used this method of evaluation while 27 percent said they used a grade and extensive comments in their evaluations

Thirty-three percent of the social science faculty members and 41 percent of the humanities faculty members said they used a grade with extensive comments as compared with only 15 percent in the physical science division and 13 percent in the biological science division. It is interesting to note, however, that only 12 percent of the students in the social science division and 4 percent in the humanities division indicated that a grade and extensive comments were used to evaluate their papers.

How Do Students Improve Their Writing Skills?

What do students say about how much their writing skills have improved during college? How do they improve their skills? Almost two-thirds of the students claimed "some" or "extensive" improvement in their writing ability since entering UW-Madison; 8 percent reported a worsening of their skills; and the remainder reported no change. Faculty respondents were less generous in their assessment, with only 4 percent reporting a "significant" improvement; 23 percent reporting "some" improvement; 22 percent reporting "no change", and 10 percent claiming that student skills have worsened. A significant 41 percent of faculty members said they simply did not know; it is not clear whether this large proportion reflects the difficulty of the questions or lack of knowledge because they do not require their students to write papers, or their infrequent teaching of undergraduate courses.

Students were asked to attribute improvements in their writing skills to several different sources, depending upon their exposure to these sources. The source of aid reported most frequently and judged most useful was regular nonwriting courses. English 101 and Communications Arts 101 or 105, courses which are required for students whose skills are deficient, received the least favorable notice. Students thought English 207 and 208 were somewhat more effective than the lower level writing courses. In addition, the Writing Laboratory was used by a considerable number of students--especially freshmen and sophomores--who reacted favorably to the help it provides. The advance writing courses were also judged useful but the proportion of students having exposure to these courses was limited. To summarize, regular courses and advanced writing courses supplemented by the Writing Laboratory seemed to be most useful to students in improving their writing skills.

Several interesting differences in viewpoint emerged for students in particular divisions. English 207 and 208 were viewed most favorably by humanities students, a not unexpected result, given the literary emphasis of these courses. On the other hand, humanities students were far less enthusiastic about the helpfulness of their regular courses. Students in the social studies division were, by contrast, most enthusiastic about the advanced writing courses and the Writing Laboratory; humanities students were least impressed with the Writing Laboratory. The reasons for these views could not be deduced from the survey results.

We asked several questions to learn more about the use of the Writing Laboratory. Slightly more than half the students reported they knew of the existence of the Lab. Students, especially freshmen and sophomores, learned about the Laboratory through faculty members. Almost a fifth of the students reported they had made use of the Writing Laboratory, with the heaviest use coming from students in the biological and social sciences. By class, freshmen and sophomores were the biggest users of the Lab. The median number of visits was about six for those students who used the Lab, with little or no difference in visits reported by students in the various divisions.

How Have Faculty Members Helped?

What have faculty members done to improve student writing since the composition requirements were changed in the early 1970's?[2] Almost three-fourths of the faculty respondents said they as individuals had done "very little" or "nothing"; another 23 percent said they had done "quite a lot," and the remaining 4 percent said they had done "a great deal." When asked about their departments, almost two-thirds of the faculty respondents said their departments had done "very little" or "nothing"; another 13 percent said their departments had done "a considerable amount"; and another quarter said they did not know.

Most faculty members have become aware of the Writing Laboratory, even more so than students. Three-fourths of the faculty say they are familiar with the Laboratory's services. Of those familiar with it, 36 percent had not recommended any students to the Laboratory; however, 52 percent had recommended from 1 to 10 students, 12 percent had recommended 11-49 students, and 2 percent had recommended more than 50 students. It is interesting to note that younger faculty members report sending more students to the Lab than older faculty.

What Should Be Done to Improve Students' Writing?

We next wanted to learn what might be done to improve the quality of student writing, focusing primary attention on the use of courses that emphasize writing. Both students and faculty thought that a required freshman composition course should be reinstituted, with the strongest support coming, not surprisingly, from faculty members; 76 percent of the faculty respondents favored such a course as compared to 61 percent of the students. About 10 percent of both students and faculty members were undecided on this question. The older the faculty members, the less strong was their support for a course. By division faculty members in the biological sciences were the strongest in their support for a required course. The strongest student support came from the humanities and social sciences with two-thirds in favor, as compared to approximately 50 percent in favor in the sciences.

Faculty opinion was evenly split between a one- or two-semester course, with a quarter of the faculty members reporting themselves undecided. Faculty members from the social sciences and humanities favored a two-semester requirement.

Students supported a one-semester course requirement by more than a 3 to 1 margin, though 40 percent of the students reported they were undecided on the question. Juniors and seniors were more strongly in favor of a two-semester course than freshmen and sophomores. By division, students' support for a one-semester proposal was strong in all but the physical sciences division where the "don't know" was a frequent answer.

In response to a question about the need for other elective writing courses for freshmen and sophomores, students heavily favored (82 percent) the establishment of such courses. However, less than 40 percent said they would take such courses if offered; the greatest support for elective courses came from students in the humanities and social sciences.

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[2]At that time the mandatory one-semester English composition course was abolished, the Writing Laboratory was established, a small proportion (under 10 percent) of entering freshmen were placed in English 101, a "college survival" composition course based on placement exam scores, and departments were to certify the writing competence of their majors as a requirement for graduation.

Students also expressed a strong belief that one-semester advanced writing courses for juniors and seniors should be established and that these should be elective courses. Again, interest lagged behind the wish for availability, with less than half those who indicated the need for such courses saying that they would enroll in them.

Irrespective of what students and faculty may want, the establishment of new courses ordinarily requires diverting resources from other programs and activities. Faculty members were asked whether the diversion of resources from other departments and programs to provide funds to staff writing courses would cause them to alter their opinion about the need for required freshman composition courses. Approximately one-quarter of those who indicated favoring a two-semester requirement opted for reducing the requirement to a one-semester course or dropping even that unless additional new funding for writing courses could be obtained.

When asked about the need for advanced writing courses at the junior-senior level, over three-fourths of the faculty respondents favored such courses, and the bulk of their support was for elective-type courses. There was a drop of about 20-25 percent in the proposition favoring such courses if it meant diverting funds from the pool of currently-available resources.

Obviously, the real test of commitment lies in the willingness on the part of departments themselves to give up resources to help improve the writing skills of their own undergraduate majors. In all, 12 percent said they definitely would give up resources, 26 percent said they might, 32 percent said they probably would not, with the remaining faculty members definitely opposed to such a diversion. Faculty members in the humanities division were most willing to give up resources to help improve the writing of their majors, with 30 percent indicating such willingness, as contrasted to 13 percent in the social sciences, 7 percent in the biological sciences, and 3 percent in the physical sciences. Younger faculty members expressed a greater willingness to divert departmental resources to such new courses.

Finally, faculty members were asked to react to several proposals that could enhance their individual ability to deal with student writing problems. Three-fourths of those who responded expressed interest in a booklet that would provide helpful suggestions to them; they also wanted to identify resource people who could provide them with assistance. About a third of those responding indicated interest in workshops to help faculty members improve their ability to help students write more effectively.

Concluding Comment

The results of these two surveys reveal the general nature of the attitudes of undergraduate students and regular faculty members on the Madison campus about the state of student writing, what is being done, and what might be done to improve students' writing skills. It is hoped that this information will assist interested students, faculty members, and others in the University community in thinking about what if anything should be done.[3]

[3] For additional information on the issues and alternatives, see the report "Improving the Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students," Committee on Undergraduate Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, May 1976.

A MODEST EFFORT AT REINFORCEMENT OF WRITING SKILLS

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Part I: The English Writing Module

During the last school year, in addition to my traditional labors examining masterworks of American literature and modern drama with my students, and poring over weekly quotas of freshman writing, I learned the principles of architectural fenestration and space allocation, studied the history of everyday life in post-Civil War America, counselled neophyte directors analyzing scripts and researchers preparing reports of psychomotor and endurance tests. An orgiastic immersion in the plenitude of a university's offerings? A megalomaniac effort to be all things to everyone? Though I felt guilty of both pretensions (or lapses) at times, and despite the desperate challenges to my versatility, I found exhilaration and stimulation were my rewards for serving as writing consultant to students in six advanced university classes. I was merely part of a nationwide shift to interdependent, cross disciplinary, integrated study. Such journals as *Improving College and University Teaching, College Composition and Communication,* and *College English* (not to mention the *Wisconsin English Journal*) have recently provided interesting essays on a wide range of experiments in writing across the curriculum. (I append a bibliography.)

The experiment at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point began when a member of the English faculty, Professor Helen Corneli, suggested what proved to be a particularly felicitous collaboration between English teachers and instructors of courses in departments other than English. Her suggestion was endorsed by the University Literacy Committee and guidelines were created by Professor Donald Pattow, the Director of Freshman English, and by Rebecca Pattow, a graduate assistant in the department.

The guidelines specified a one-credit reading or writing module in English to be offered adjacent to a course in another subject that required significant reading or writing. These one-credit modules were designed to supplement and reinforce skills that begin in the freshman courses.

Though our effort has the same goals and objectives as all English integrated study, namely to provide that responsibility for writing improvement is shared and to insure that teachers of writing are aware of the pressure of experience on language, the Stevens Point experiment is distinctive in that it places the English teachers in a specific relation to the course with the reading or writing emphasis. The English teacher reads the same texts as the student in the history or philosophy or interior design course. The teacher in the parent course may invite the English teacher to teach reading techniques or rhetorical principles and strategies or writing skills as the need arises. Planning for the work of both courses is done jointly. For the reading module, the English instructor may offer specialized techniques and methods required by the text and subject material of the particular parent course. For the writing module, the English instructor may provide specialized writing techniques, forms, models and methods needed for that course and subject area.

The Stevens Point experiment is also distinctive in that participation in a reading or writing module is optional for students enrolled in the

parent course. Those who choose the additional English credit will have the opportunity to meet with the English instructor, individually or in small groups, to discuss reading problems or to analyze their writing before creating final drafts to submit in the parent course. Students registering for the English module receive the appropriate number of credits for the parent course and one credit for English. The reading/writing modules are offered for pass/fail credit only. The English evaluation, based on such criteria as reading/writing improvement and the quality of participation in conferences and special assignments, does not *directly* affect the grade earned in the parent course; that is, the English instructor does not participate in any way in assigning grades for students in the parent course.

Finally, our guidelines assure participating departments that English instructors will be assigned to "modules" on the basis of academic background, interest, and compatibility with the parent course instructor. Professor Mary Ann Baird has written the essay following mine describing one of the happiest experiences of the experiment. Her energetic commitment to the effort to improve student writing motivated her class to a fine pitch of enthusiasm.

Student enthusiasm reflected in all the modules justified this mode of supplementing and reinforcing the arts and skills of reading and writing established in freshman English. I concluded that limiting evaluation to pass/fail freed these advanced students from their fear of jeopardizing their academic standing and released them to reveal weaknesses and to seek help. I felt sought out to collaborate with them in their effort to achieve at the highest possible level not only in the parent course but also in their professional lives beyond the university which were suddenly in frightening proximity. The modesty of the one-credit course was of value in reducing the threat for students and it was of value for faculty in that the English module did not intrude on the parent course. It was there to support and enhance but not to share or usurp class time.

However, as I suggested in my opening remarks, sharing is one of the benefits of the experiment for the English Department. Department members teaching the adjacent modules perforce learn, intimately and specifically, the professional writing needs of their students. Working beside the colleague who assigns the space allocation rationale or the script analysis or the report of stress test data refines the English teacher's judgment of students' writing needs. It seems likely that refinement will manifest itself in the cogency, relevance, and focus of the writing assigned in the traditional freshman and expository writing classes offered in the English Department.

Part II: The Home Economics Parent Course

Why would a university teacher of interior design want to become involved in a writing module? As a teacher, I had always felt that writing was an important part of my course requirements. Circling misspelled words, correcting punctuation, calling attention to poor sentence and paragraph structure and asking for the clarification or reorganization of content has been a part of my regular routine. However, over a period of time, as I became more deeply involved with the technical and aesthetic aspects of interior design, I realized I was slighting my attention to the written assignments. So, when a notice was circulated that anyone interested in having a one credit writing module attached to their parent course should call the English Department, I immediately called. This was an offer I could not refuse.

Why was I particularly interested in the attached writing module? My senior level Contract Interior Design, 3 credits, is a laboratory course which is highly technical and design oriented. Because of the nature of the subject matter, both the students and I tended to become immersed in our discipline's assumptions and related jargon. Yet one of the primary future professional tasks for these graduates will be the ability to communicate their design concepts to clients basically unfamiliar with these architectural design terms and assumptions. The attached module, taught by an English professor, provided the ideal opportunity for an objective "outsider" to be involved in the communication process. The students would then have to clearly communicate to someone outside the parent discipline.

Another reason for my excitement about the attached module was that I could have a bonus learning experience which could help improve my teaching methods. I could hopefully improve my instructions for future writing assignments. How did the module fit into Contract Interior Design? I made no modifications or additions to the existing course syllabus. The five major written assignments used the previous semester remained the same. Six professional periodical article summaries were expected to include a summary of the article and the reader's personal reactions to the content. A detailed descriptive analysis of an interior space was also required, following an afternoon tour of a large new commercial building. The major written assignments, however, involved further clarification of the major design project[1] which encompassed the entire semester. The three major written assignments for the project included a space rationale, a design concept description and a final summary and evaluation. The space rationale was to detail the allocation and arrangement of space for the new functions and to explain the reasoning used in arriving at the final solutions. The design concept required "painting a picture" with words so that the client could visualize the impression, mood, colors, forms, textures and general feeling created by the designer. The final summary and evaluation of the project was to include a summary of the process used to arrive at the final design solution, an evaluation of the results, and the student's self evaluation of personal growth, strengths and weaknesses as a designer.

What were the results of combining the writing module with the parent course? The positive results included student and teacher benefits. The student's results were immediately evident with the first written assignment. The periodical summaries showed greater thought involvement and insight. This was probably due to the clearly stated instructions and examples given by the English teacher. It was probably also due to a greater awareness on the student's part that "Oh yes - writing is not just an element to be dealt with in English class. It even relates to interior design."

The finished writings improved in clarity and interest when compared with the similar writings from previous semesters. The closer scrutiny given to these assignments by teacher and student may have influenced this change. This clarity and conciseness in thinking also seemed to carry over into other upper level interior design courses which involved the same students.

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[1]The project for this particular semester involved the redesign of an existing 7,000 square foot school building for two new functions: an office complex for a legal firm and a public cafeteria to serve a professional complex. The project solution was to include a complete set of drafted floor plans, detail drawings, coded furniture schedule, electrical and telephone plans, lighting schedule, reflected ceiling plan, material and finish schedule, wall elevations, perspective sketches, colored renderings, color-textrue boards and a project manual containing additional written specifications and reports.

The descriptive writing in the analysis of the commercial building and in the explanation of the design concept was particularly improved from previous semesters. Several of the students involved the reader in a total sensory experience and made it possible to "feel" the designed space through the verbal descriptions. These finished assignments, as compared to previous semesters, were no longer merely factual reports, but instead became "paintings with words."

The results for me, the teacher, were also evident. Because of the greater organization, clarity and picturesque descriptions, I had more interesting and exciting papers to read. It was refreshing and invigorating to renew within myself the positive aesthetic experience of reading well written assignments. I, as a teacher, also gained by being involved in a bonus refresher course. By observing my English teacher colleague, I became more aware of how to clarify my assignments and how to express my expectations of written style and content.

This module attachment experience was exciting and rewarding. It would be great to continue this arrangement on a regular basis. However, economics and increased demands from other departments and teachers for the attached module make this an unrealistic expectation. I would, however, see the benefits to students and non-English teachers if this type of arrangement were available periodically.

This module attachment was a particularly rewarding experience for students and myself because of my English faculty colleague's personal compatibility and the empathy shown for the specialized requirements. I can see that problems could arise if this were not so. My professional evaluation of this is obviously based on only one semester of experience. However, the results were so positive and the carry-over so strong, I feel a need to share this with others. The ultimate worth of the experience was improvement in students' writing. Based on this personal experience and on student feed-back; I highly recommend this module approach to other subject matter specialists. Try it, you'll like it!

The Correlation of Writing with Other Subjects

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Continued on page 30

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SCHOOLING AND COMPOSITION LEARNING*

TERRANCE SHERIDAN
Assistant Superintendent-Curriculum
Eau Claire Public Schools

ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

Faith in United States social and political institutions generally declined from the late 1960s to the late 1970s. Harris Poll ratings taken in 1967 and again in 1972 substantiate that general decline as do annual opinion polls taken by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago and the Gallup Poll through 1980. Levels of confidence in these polls were rated as "great", "some" and "little."

	1967	1978	Ranking
Medicine	73%	45.9%	1
Scientific Community	56%	39.0%	2
Education	63%	37.0%	3
Military	62%	29.0%	5
Major Companies	39%	21.0%	8
Press	33%	24.0%	9
Congress	41%	13.0%	12

The 1980 Gallup Poll included a question related to public confidence in American institutions. The public schools rank second only behind the church or organized religion in that poll.

The conclusion is that while public confidence in social and political institutions has declined, education still ranks high since its overall position is third only behind medicine and science. Despite this relatively high rating, we have suffered from a rather negative press and a lack of communication to the larger public about our successes. Since no one else will take the initiative to build our public support, it is clear that we who work in the schools must begin to tell our own story. No one else can do the job as well as we can as no one else knows the facts as well. In short, we need to mount an aggressive campaign of good news. The rebuilding of a trust must be given top priority. We need public support for the good of education and the benefit of students. As Will Rogers so wisely observed "Even if you are on the right track you'll get run over if you just sit there."

And what is this good news?

NAEP Data: (1) Mechanical writing skills among 17 year olds are adequate. (2) Writing decline is not in lower level skills but in higher level skills.

Gallup Poll: Sixty-four percent of the people surveyed in 1980 gave the schools a grade of A, B or C, twelve percent D, and six percent fail. Eighty-two percent of the people indicated that the schools were "extremely important to one's future success," but only 48 percent would like to have their child take up teaching as opposed to 75 percent in 1969.

Local Assessment Data: STEP test scores range from low to 70 (4th writing - 9th vocabulary) to a high of 95+ percentile in Eau Claire. They have shown a steady increase over the past five years. Writing samples collected over

*A version of the speech given at the Eau Claire regional Composition Conference.

a three year period in grades 7, 9 and 11 indicate that over 90 percent of the population has attained a functional writing level. Recent Wisconsin assessment data indicates that Wisconsin students score well above the national average in all basic skill areas. (60-70 percentiles in 4-8/50-60 in 12th). SAT and ACT scores locally are well above state, mid-west and national averages and university survey data indicates that local graduates compare very favorably with other entering freshmen.

Miscellaneous: Avril Font's 5th grade class at Randall School nosed out Dan Ogan's in the Tigger Reading Clubs bi-weekly contest (137-131 for total books read).

Median Years School Completed: 1910 - 8.1; 1975 - 12.3 - and rising

Percent of 5-17 Year Olds Enrolled: 1900 - 72%; 1976 - 89%

Percent of 5-17 Year Olds Attending: 1900 - 69%; 1976 - 92%

Percent of High School Graduates: 1900 - 6%; 1975 - 74%

Teachers in Eau Claire and throughout the nation are continuing to provide instruction in composition and other skills using the best techniques they are aware of. That is precisely what they were doing prior to the 1970s and that is what they have continued to do during the 1970s; furthermore, it is what they will continue to do during the 1980s. This fact must be recognized and appreciated; albeit that their successes are limited and their support and recognition has dwindled. I congratulate them for their perseverance.

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

I propose a concept of shared accountability for schooling in general and composition instruction specifically. This concept of shared accountability necessitates that we re-examine the roles of school, family, church and community, identify which is appropriately responsible for each of the variables that impact on students' learning and hold each accountable for the accomplishment of their assigned responsibilities. To do less is unfair. It is an impossible task to expect teacher accountability when accountability is designed as an expectation that all students will achieve at a given level, given "X" amount of time and "X" amount of resources. That to me is simply an impossible expectation to lay on anyone when the variables that impact on the process are not completely controlled by the institution or the person being held accountable.

What are the responsibilities that exist outside the school?

1. Provide assurance that homework will be completed. Students must develop a sense of responsibility for the success of the class, for having others depend on them rather than perpetuating the psychology that class will continue, which it does, if they perform no work outside of class. Skills are taught in school; however, they must be practiced in the home to assure success.

2. Assurance of regular attendance. This includes avoiding taking students to Colorado for 2 weeks; missing school for dental appointments, doctor appointments, skating lessons, ballet lessons, Christmas shopping; allowing them to work after school despite the fact they are behind in their school work; and a host of other reasons including deer hunting and basketball viewing.

3. Providing motivation to learn. (This is shared responsibility.) Teachers must be responsible for providing opportunities for learning in an environment that makes learning attractive. However, only the student can actually do the learning. You can provide specific motivation for a class or lesson; however, sustained and general motivation for education must come from the home and the larger society. Today's world of instant gratification has produced children that are prone to give up too easily when confronted with difficult tasks. Presently educators must spend too much time on these aspects of learning, since without them their efforts are doomed to failure. In short, learning cannot be imposed; it must be pursued.

4. There must be assurance of compliance with reasonable rules and expectations. The school must be responsible for the establishment of them, for allowing students due process, and for teaching students that they are citizens and that their rights will be respected. Parents and society must assure compliance or provide logical consequences.

5. Societal expectations for the role of the school must become realistic. Everyone has expectations. Two people constitute a legal group and everyone is a specialist in educational evaluation and educational identification of priorities. All of this results in no shortage of recommendations which have their advocates who feel they should be implemented yesterday and with fewer resources. The school has been asked to serve as an agent for solving social problems with increasing frequency. These problems range from equal opportunity for the sexes to equal opportunity for racial groups through desegregation to provision of assuring student rights, incorporating due process, employment rights, teaching nutrition, teaching family life and sex education, parenting, solving the drug problem, developing a sensitivity for the declining confidence of the business and industrial world and a host of other social and economic issues.

   These unrealistic expectations have created what I perceive as a crisis of perspective. It stems from a psychology of entitlement which exists in the larger society and which is impacting on the schools. It can best be summed by the logic that if we have a want -- that creates a legitimate right to have that want fulfilled irrespective of need or effort or whether we deserve it. We have a right to a free appropriate education, we have a right to read, we have a right to due process, we have a right to express ourselves. We must change this perspective from an orientation of right to one of responsibility. This is fundamental.

6. Assurance that students are raised in a total family unit. The changing lifestyles of the family have produced a situation where children are adopting the academic values of their peer group, not the family. Currently 40% of all married women with young children work. This figure is estimated to increase to 70% by 1990. Eleven million American children live in single parent families. One million school age children will be exposed to the break-up of their parents this year. It is estimated that over 50% of them will suffer permanent learning problems because of it. It is estimated at 45% of all children born in 1978 will spend part of their childhood in single parent families.

7. Protection of teacher time to assure maximum utilization of time on task. (Shared responsibility). The drain of teacher energy from direct to indirect activities of education. Many persons perceive increasing numbers of teachers to be incompetent, unmotivated, or uninterested and

call for accountability measures. The fact is, however, that educators in general and teachers in particular are held to higher standards of subject knowledge and competency in planning, implementing and evaluating instruction today than in any other time in our history. It is true, however, that their energies are being drained by the necessity to be knowledgeable about too many things, to relate to too many resource experts and to perform too many time consuming quasi-administrative tasks of an accountability or information nature that do not directly impact on the teaching/learning process. The net result is less energy and time for direct services to students. Many people have referred to this as the great teacher burnout. I submit that it is more appropriately the great teacher alienation.

8. Re-emphasize the value of education. The importance of education in general and reading and writing in particular must be re-emphasized by the larger society. Students must be given a responsibility to learn rather than being allowed to continue with the idea that they have the right to learn irrespective of their own efforts in that process.

9. A de-emphasis of the psychology that learning must be fun. There is a necessity that exists currently to make education fun and entertaining. This is simply not possible. Yet, the powerful authority emanating from the sacred Olympus of sports and entertainment induces many a student to substitute diversion for education. Education cannot be entertaining and cannot always be fun.

This concept of shared responsibility in developing language arts skills must also be addressed within the school. Simply stated, all teachers must share a responsibility for the reinforcement of reading and writing skills. What then must educators be held accountable for? Educators can and must, in my judgment, be held accountable within this concept of shared responsibility for at least the following:

1. Identify those skills and concepts for which we will provide instruction and then have that agenda validated by the larger community.

2. Provide instruction in the specified skills and concepts using the best techniques we are capable of and for the precise time specified.

3. Provide a competent and objective assessment of the results.

4. Provide corrective assistance where necessary.

5. Report fully and accurately on the results and solicit feedback.

<u>Relationship of What is Currently Happening or Should Happen to Five Step Accountability Model</u>

1. Identify what we are going to provide instruction in.

   --develop local skill continuum K-12. (Kids grow in spurts mentally as well as physically.)
   --develop curriculum guides for each course and/or grade level. (Use uniform format and provide vertical and horizontal articulation.
   --survey the business and professional community for feedback on performance of graduates to identify areas of need or weakness as well as strengths.
   --establish a state curriculum development project. (audiences-functions-modes)

2. Provide instruction in a professionally competent, intellectually honest manner in those areas in which we indicated we would

--follow established guides - match of classroom instruction with established curriculum (program monitoring).
--go beyond skill development, functional writing and literal comprehension and assure development of higher literacy skills.
--teach writing as a process which includes pre-writing, writing, re-writing and editing. It is recommended that 85% of the time be spent on pre-writing activities. Assignment-product-evaluation oriented teacher spends 85% of time on evaluation.
--use sentence combining to develop syntactic maturity.
--teach grammar as grammar but recognize that it involves comprehension not composing and hence is not an end in itself.
--teach writing in context with appropriate development and/or reinforcement of skills as opposed to teaching skills in isolation.
--evaluate writing in meaningful ways without the necessity of constantly being "overloaded" with assignments to read. (Student evaluation/don't need to evaluate all writing.)
--recognize the necessity for and be capable of teaching different forms of writing. All forms are not appropriate for all students; the elementary program should not be limited to creative forms.
--recognize and deal with reading problems and their association with writing.
--gear instruction to intellectual level and vocational, social and academic needs of students.
--discuss class size issue and talk about trade-offs involved in demands for lower class size vs. assurances of what different instruction for writing classes will be taught as a result of the lower size.

3. Assess the results.

--classroom level - need skills in managing, scoring and feedback of writing efforts.
--district level - establish direct (writing samples) and indirect (achievement tests) assessment.
--state and national level - approaches include: state writing assessment, ACT-SAT (TSWE), NAEP.

There are advantages and disadvantages of direct and indirect as well as at all levels. Personally I feel we need both; however, we need to produce instructive information for classroom teachers and provide longitudinal data for comparative purposes. This will necessitate using a combination of holistic (heavenly guidance) and analytic approaches to scoring of direct assessment. We know papers can be reliably scored. There is much in the literature on this issue. (CAPT and NAEP publications are excellent sources)

4. Provide specialized instruction and/or corrective assistance where necessary.

--differentiated instruction - not necessarily retention; however, we could justify more of that as well.
--use of ability group (must change content and approach as well as pace)

5. Report fully and accurately on the results

--reporting to whom; post-secondary; board and general public; business community; teachers and parents.

--discuss how, when and what to report as well as to whom to report
--develop reporting mechanisms that are meaningful to laymen; solicit feedback

Clearly a high priority must be placed on the issue of continued improvement of writing skills. To cite some remarks made by Rexford Brown in his address at the WCTE Invitational Composition Conference in 1980:

> This is clearly a problem that we can't attack haphazardly. Just as we're facing on the energy front the reality that all things are interdependent and that piecemeal steps won't solve our problems, we have to face the reality that the same conditions obtain on the educational front. We won't solve the writing problem by focusing our attention on the most superficial aspect of writing or even by focusing on writing itself as an area cut off somehow from the rest of our lives. The basics we must get back to are the basics of creating coherent lives for ourselves by means of that symbolic faculty that distinguishes us from all the other forms of life on the planet.
>
> To repeat for the last time: whatever the evidence, always act like the Promethean fire of writing is in danger. This most powerful, yet most vulnerable, of gifts from the gods makes our very humanization possible. In the chilly, dark days ahead, we can't afford to lose one more degree of heat or a single additional quantum of life.

A Modest Effort at Reinforcement . . .
Continued from page 24

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BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Phelps, Ethel Johnston. *The Maid of the North - Feminist Folk Tales From Around the World,* Illus. Lloyd Bloom. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981.

The Maid of the North has her own ideas about whom and when she is to marry; a Celtic mother has the courage to confront the fairy queen when she emerges from the underground on May eve; Lady Ragnell is trapped in an animal-like condition of mottled green skin and weed-like spiked hair; a Zuni maiden defies tradition and becomes the hunter for her family; and Elsa forces a wizard to release his captives because of a strand of her long yellow hair which she cleverly uses to repair his cloak. These are only a few of the folktale women the reader will meet in this unusual collection which represents 17 different cultures. Familiar tales such as "Duffy and the Devil" and "The Husband Who Stayed Home" are interspersed among the less familiar. The women are resourceful, independent thinkers who rescue heroes from disaster, take action to solve a problem posed by the plot, have self-confidence and a clear sense of their own worth--all within the structure of the traditional folktale. The collection offers a good source of read-aloud material for primary-grade children and independent reading for older children.

Mary Jett-Simpson, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Van Allsburg, Chris. *Jumanji.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1981. Ages 6-10.

Relating the adventures of children left by adults to amuse themselves is a familiar story premise. In *Jumanji,* Judy and Peter, left alone one afternoon, exhaust their supply of toys, and decide to wander into the park. There they find the board game, Jumanji, under a tree, and Judy convinces Peter to play it. Once home, Judy carefully reads the instructions which seem like those for many other games--roll the dice and move accordingly along the path to the board's goal. The last instruction clearly states that once begun the game must be completed. Peter's boredom and skepticism about the game end with his first turn, for the words on the board's squares become reality. When Peter lands on the square, "Lion attacks, move back two spaces," a roaring lion appears. Because of the instructions, the children know they must complete the game, but as each succeeding square comes to life, the children must face hungry monkeys, stampeding rhinos, a volcano, and other exotic and frightening things. At last Judy reaches the game's goal and the household returns to normal. The animals are gone and all damage is undone. The children quickly return the game to the park and return home exhausted.

This brief summary may suggest that the story is merely a variation on *The Cat in the Hat,* but Van Allsburg's illustrations, similar in style to his *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi,* make the story original and appropriately exciting, even scary. Using black and white, he draws the objects in the foreground so large in most pictures that the viewer may feel as though s/he is an immediate observer. Shading, perspective, and line are used to make these clearly three dimensional. The book jacket describes the text as being surrealistic, but it is the illustrations, not the story, which create this impression.

Primary age audiences will enjoy the obvious pattern of the book. After the first board square comes alive, readers can anticipate what might come next. The open ended conclusion gives readers further chance to speculate and also distinguishes *Jumanji* as being more than a copy of other books. On the last page Peter and Judy watch as two boys pick up the game in the park and carry it off. They have heard about these boys, and they know that they never read instructions.

Linda Western, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

David Guy. *Football Dreams.* Seaview Books, 1980. 314 pp. Senior High.

How adolescents grow up is the subject matter of adolescent fiction. Some stories stress insight. A girl or boy gets into a mess, for example. The nastiness of it, helpfully elucidated by a friend or mentor, drives home a point about maturity.

In such stories the role of experience is to soften characters up. The main character must suffer, or somebody must suffer because of her, if the insight is to take. *The Pigman* and *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But A Sandwich* are examples. In other stories, fewer in number, the role of experience is to start characters moving in new directions. Doing new things, the character becomes somebody new. Insight here is recognition that growth has occurred. *A Day No Pigs Would Die* and *One Fat Summer* are examples.

Football Dreams makes use of both story patterns. It gives us Dan Keith, fat, shy, and not especially talented, making himself over, by sustained effort, into a successful football player. The effort so dominates his early thinking that he fails to note the gravity of his father's illness. Nor does he react with any critical awareness as he first encounters a stupid coach and instances of stupidity and viciousness on the part of his teammates and classmates generally. He is working, he thinks, to impress his father and to gain approval within the school. His football skill and his critical awareness grow together, however, and his greatest success as a player comes after his father has died and he has given up caring about approval. He finishes school more able to play than at any earlier point, but no longer anxious about playing.

I liked the book for the way it made experience and insight work together. What Dan did readied him for the outlook he finally adopted, and made that outlook plausible. I also liked the way in which the narrative as a whole was amply dramatized, with events shifting among nicely detailed places and with some minor characters made interesting in their own right. Nick Kaiser, the bright, tough kid who didn't fit in, could himself serve as the focus for a new Guy novel. When Guy does write that second novel, he should check himself against overuse of long syntactic units attached as modifiers of main clauses. His heavy use of these cumulative sentences amounts to a mannerism in *Football Dreams*.

Richard Western, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Scott, Beth and Michael Norman. *Haunted Wisconsin*. Sauk City, Wisconsin: Stanton and Lee Publishers, Inc., 1980.

Lingering specters, phantom animals, poltergeists and other apparitions haunt houses, inns and byways of Wisconsin - or are believed to by the tellers of these tales. Not the authors, necessarily, who plead neutrality, reporting "what happened." But the telling is often so well done, dramatic and detailed, as to make even the strictest non-believer, me, wonder.

The stories, divided according to regions of the state, while overlapping in their content and "activities," nevertheless provide diversity of situation and events. They range from the tale of "The Psychic Sisters" who have been visited by former friends who somehow convey their reactions and predictions to them and "The Cantankerous Ghost of St. Croix County" which caused boxes and chairs to move, dresses to disappear, thumping noises, kitchen equipment to become airborne, and the like, from the mildly mischievous to the violently destructive. Faces in mirrors, footsteps striding in upstairs rooms, doors left ajar, flying objects, white-clad horsemen, dogs appearing and disappearing under tables or on roadsides - the "facts" are here. This book is not the type that can be read from cover to cover, but I find myself returning to it to read/reread still another tale.

Nicholas J. Karolides, University of Wisconsin-River Falls

IN MEMORIAM: ERNIE J. HEIMAN

Ernie J. Heiman, a past-president of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of Teachers of English (1971-72), died unexpectedly in June. He contributed much to WCTE. In addition to the presidency, he served as associate executive secretary for many years (1973-77) and NCTE liaison officer (1978-79). He was head of the English Department at Monona Grove High School and was co-author of numerous texts on language and composition. In addition to these large roles, Ernie contributed in many small ways to the profession and to people. WCTE will miss you, Ernie.

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SERVICE BULLETIN No. 38 - Bibliography of Native American Books for Elementary Grades. April, 1979. Compiled by Maxine Burress, UW-Stevens Point. A selected annotated bibliography of books for children in grades K-8. Appropriate grade levels are indicated. 75¢

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